



## Interview with Charles Wuorinen

Dear readers of the journal

“Problemy muzykal’noj nauki / Music Scholarship”!

The editorial board of the journal “Problemy muzykal’noj nauki / Music Scholarship” is happy to present an interview with the famous American composer Charles Wuorinen. At the present time Wuorinen is the most well-known composer of twelve-tone music in the USA. He was born in New York City in 1938, studied at Columbia University in New York, and subsequently taught at many universities and conservatories in the USA, including Columbia University, Manhattan School of Music (New York), Princeton University and Rutgers University (New Jersey), New England Conservatory (Massachusetts), etc. In 1970 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his electronic composition *Time’s Encomium*, composed with the use of the RCA Synthesizer at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. In his music Wuorinen adheres to the musical traditions of Schoenberg and Stravinsky (especially the latter’s late period), and asserts that he was most influenced in his music by American composers Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt and German émigré to the United States Stefan Wolpe. The composer was also inspired by the fractal theories of mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot. Similar to Babbitt, Wuorinen has incorporated serial rhythm, in many cases projecting the latter onto the formal structures of entire compositions, following his own invented system. From 1962 to the mid-2010s, along



Charles Wuorinen.  
Photo by Nina Roberts

with composer and performer Harvey Solberger, he was one of the leaders of the concert series, the Group for Contemporary Music, devoted to performance of works by contemporary composers. In the 1970s Wuorinen wrote an orchestral composition *A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky*, in which he incorporated the last musical sketches of the great master. Wuorinen is the author of a book on serial music, titled *Simple Composition*, which he characterizes as a manual for composers, meant to teach them how to compose music, and not a music theory book analyzing already composed works. Wuorinen’s music is well-known in the USA and in the countries of Western Europe, where there are frequent premiere performances of his new compositions, among which it becomes proper to name his eight symphonies, his trilogy of ballets based on the theme of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, compositions for chorus and orchestra on Biblical themes: *Genesis* and *A Celestial Sphere*, music for piano, various chamber ensembles, percussion ensembles and several operas. Music lovers in Russia have yet to discover for itself the music of this intriguing composer (see website [www.charleswuorinen.com](http://www.charleswuorinen.com)), and we hope that this interview, which is the first publication about the composer in this country, shall serve as an impetus for further popularization of his music in Russia.



### Уважаемые читатели журнала «Проблемы музыкальной науки / Music Scholarship»!

Редакция журнала «Проблемы музыкальной науки» рада представить интервью с американским композитором Чарлзом Уориненом. В настоящее время Уоринен является самым известным композитором двенадцатитоновой музыки в США. Он родился в Нью-Йорке в 1938 году, обучался композиции в Колумбийском университете и впоследствии преподавал во многих университетах и консерваториях США, включая Колумбийский университет, Манхэттенскую школу музыки (Нью-Йорк), Университет Ратгерс и Принстонский университет (штат Нью-Джерси), Консерваторию Новой Англии (Массачусетс) и др. В 1970 году он был удостоен Пулитцеровской премии за электронное сочинение «Time's Epitaph» («Славословие времени»), созданное при помощи синтезатора RCA Synthesizer в Студии электронной музыки Колумбийского и Принстонского университетов. В своей музыке Уоринен придерживается традиций Арнольда Шёнберга и Игоря Стравинского (в особенности, позднего периода), и утверждает, что наибольшее влияние на его музыку оказали американские композиторы Эллиотт Картер и Милтон Бэббитт, а также немецкий эмигрант в США Штефан Вольпе. Он также был вдохновлен фрактальными математическими теориями математика Бенуа Мандельброта. Вслед за Бэббитом, Уоринен в своих сочинениях использовал серийный ритм, в некоторых случаях проектируя его на форму целого сочинения, следуя своей собственной, им

изобретённой системе. С 1962 до середины 2010 годов, вместе с композитором и исполнителем Харви Солбергером, он был одним из руководителей концертной серии «Group for Contemporary Music» («Группы современной музыки»), ставящей задачу исполнения сочинений современных композиторов. В 1970-х годах Уоринен написал сочинение «A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky» («Усыпальница Игоря Стравинского»), где использовал последние музыкальные наброски Стравинского. Уоринен – автор книги о серийной музыке «Simple Composition», которую он характеризует более как пособие для композиторов для обучения сочинению музыки, нежели как музыкально-теоретическую книгу, анализирующую уже написанное. Музыка Уоринена широко известна в США и странах Западной Европы, где часто звучат его новые сочинения, среди которых можно назвать восемь симфоний, несколько опер, трилогию балетов по «Божественной комедии» Данте, произведения для хора и оркестра на библейские темы «Genesis» и «A Celestial Sphere», музыку для фортепиано, различных камерных ансамблей, ансамблей ударных инструментов. Российской публике ещё предстоит открыть для себя музыку этого интригующего композитора (см. сайт: [www.charleswuorinen.com](http://www.charleswuorinen.com)), и мы надеемся, что данное интервью, являющееся первой публикацией о композиторе в стране, послужит толчком для дальнейшей популяризации его музыки в России.

*Mr. Wuorinen, can you tell us about the style of music you represent? You are known as a representative of the Uptown School, a composer of twelve-tone music, and you have written computer music.*

These characterizations are essentially labels, which do not mean anything. Besides that, they are not necessarily reflective of my methods. Certainly, I would say that a large part of what I do emerges ultimately from the tradition established by Schoenberg and continued by Milton Babbitt, also with a lot of influence of the twelve-tone period of Stravinsky. Nevertheless, these labels are very bad to use, because they are substitutes for thought and for listening. So I do not think that they are helpful at all. Furthermore, I do not have any particular capacity for self-portraiture. I just compose the music that I do, and I leave for others to describe it. I just wish their descriptions were more accurate.

*Could you tell us, where you studied, who your musical teachers were and what your primary musical influences were?*

My primary artistic professional education came from professional life more than anything else. I went to Columbia University, from where I received my Bachelor's and Master's Degrees. However, the teachers I had there did not really offer me much of interest, so I do not feel I owe them any particular artistic debt. On the other hand, because I was in New York, I came into contact with Milton Babbitt, Stepan Wolpe and Elliott Carter, who were the three major sources of inspiration on me. They influenced me not because I studied with them, which I never did, but because I knew them personally, heard their music and examined it. I had also been friends with Edgard Varese, who was no theoretician, needless to say, but his attitudes on music also had an effect on me. So these are the confessions of an autodidact, more than anything else. Such is the way my artistic personality was shaped.

It must be emphasized in this connection that during the time of my youth there was an attitude, – which has changed a great deal since then, – that everything in the field of new music was meant to be a constant redefinition of music, which would continuously take place. Each new musical composition would present something which has never been done before. This was an ideology which spanned a very wide spectrum of compositional attitudes. In this regard John Cage had the same attitude as Milton Babbitt did. In fact, before these two particular composers realized how totally opposite they were, they were even friendly with each other at a certain point. So that was something which always made me uneasy, even when I was a very young composer, because I could not see how one could live in a perpetual state of revolution. This is an ideological cause, rather than a sense of musical perception. Of course, the European composers of that time, such as Boulez and Stockhausen, used this mainly as public posture, which had very little artistic meaning. But in America you cannot get away with that so much, since nobody cares. These were genuinely held convictions, albeit in very different ways: Elliott Carter interpreted them one way, Milton Babbitt – another way, and John Cage – a third way. Nonetheless, they all maintained these attitudes, and this made me uneasy, since I could not see how human beings could live in a perpetual state of upheaval. Things had to settle down, in the long run. Changes and expansions of compositional processes had to be consolidated. So I took it on myself as my vocation to try to assimilate the stylistic traits I developed in my music and not necessarily push them farther, because, as far as I could see, farther motion towards a supposed “progress” in music represented a kind of abyss. This is especially in view of the fact that the truly revolutionary results in music had already been achieved in the

earliest years of the 20th century, where, on the one hand, there was Stravinsky, on the other hand, there was Schoenberg. The rest of what essentially happened in the 20th century in music is essentially an afterthought. So this is one point I must make. The second point, related to this, is that I grew very tired hearing constantly that there was an unbridgeable gap or gulf between the music of the diatonic past and the music of the chromatic present. It seemed to me that there could be made a continuity, which is what I have tried to express in my work.

It was not helpful in the least, of course, that at the same time and ever since there have been whole series of composers who have totally refused to take into account what had been done by such masters as Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Stravinsky, Carter and Babbitt, and all the rest, and have asserted that the world of diatonic tonality is the only one that makes any difference, and they would just limit themselves to that forever. If any of them could write a composition as good as, say, Delibes at his finest, then I would be convinced by them, but they are usually not capable of composing such good music.

*You wrote the book "Simple Composition," in which you describe the serial technique in great detail. In the last chapter of the book you propose a new system in which the twelve-tone row becomes transformed into serial rhythm, as Babbitt had done before, after which the rhythmic principle is extended into the respective sections of a musical composition and determines its form.*

I wrote the book "Simple Composition" out of sense of impatience with the fact that all of the writings, as far as I knew, about Schoenberg's tradition and the twelve-tone system were essentially analytical and theoretical, rather than presenting guides to musical composition. It seemed to me that if a composer, especially a young composer, wanted to learn apply any of these techniques

in his music, there was no need for him to read a theory book or article. It would not be helpful for the development of his compositional skills, because, after all, theory depends on perception. How could you perceive a composition which does not yet exist? So what I tried to do in this book, – which has been consistently mischaracterized, – was to write an instructive book, a practical, rather than a theoretical work. Everybody claimed that this was a theoretical book, but it was not so. It was simply a means for giving some ideas how to write a composition.

In particular, about the question of the extension of the principles derived from the twelve-tone pitch system in the domain of time, – if anyone is interested in this anymore, – it is the insight of Babbitt that pitch is determined by the intervals of pitch, and that if one tries to translate that into temporal terms, it has to be in the temporal or time interval between the events, not the rhythm. Rhythm is epiphenomenal, it comes out of these more fundamental relationships. The great silly mistake that the European serialists made in their attempts was to try to produce twelve-tone rhythms. I have no idea what that means, and neither did they, obviously, because they had abandoned these attempts at the end of the 1950s, as they could not do anything with them anymore. But this insight, that the pitch continuum divided by intervals and functioning through constellations of intervals can be translated directly into temporal terms, as you make time interval the interval between events – usually attacks of notes, though not always – that is the equivalence, and that is where a potentially rich field of compositionally activity can exist.

Around the same time, I came across the works of Benoit Mandelbrot in the field of mathematics. Unfortunately, Mandelbrot died recently – we had been friends with him for a long time. He was born in Poland, and, being



Jewish, he fled from the Nazis, and lived in Paris for a while, where he was educated in part. Eventually he came to the United States and, among his multifold fields of activity, he was in the research department of IBM for a long time. He was a mathematician, though, to a greater degree, a geometer, and his contribution is an enormously important field. It was very fashionable at a certain point, the interest having calmed down to a certain degree now. Mandelbrot was interested not in analyzing the root causes of natural events, but in describing them. He wanted to describe natural objects and processes in a geometric way which did not involve abstractions. There are Euclidian forms of abstractions, such as a mountain turning into a triangle, and these are not helpful at all. Among the central part of his investigation was the notion that the traditional Euclidian idea of spatial dimensions that are threefold – up-down, back-and-forth, and sideways – is not really the way the natural world is devised. There are many objects in the natural world, – in fact, most of them, – and, certainly, many processes which take place over time, which lie between these rigid spatial dimensions. For instance, just thinking of an extremely irregular outline of something, such as a line – it is supposedly one-dimensional, but it occupies so much space, that it cannot be one-dimensional, but it is not two dimensional either. He developed a very simple and rational means of determining this. There is a famous question which has to do with this, which is: “How long is the coast of Britain?”. The point of the question is: the answer – the number – depends entirely on the measuring stick. If you are using a one-inch measuring stick and every little inlet and outlet of the coastline, you will get an enormously greater number than if you would use the yardstick. So the question is: is it really just a line? This is a very interesting subject. However, in the course of all this, he also developed

an important idea of recursive shapes and processes, that is, things that are shaped and nested inside larger replicas of themselves. There are many aspects, some are strictly deterministic and geometrical, others are statistical.

When I was looking at this and coming into contact with it, I felt like the famous bourgeois of Moliere, who discovered that throughout all his life he had been speaking in prose. Likewise, I discovered that I had been speaking Mandelbrotian, because my compositional method had to do precisely that – of taking large-scale temporal intervallic structures from pitch materials, generalizing them into large shapes defined by large proportional time intervals, and then inside each of these nesting replicas of the same thing, or close transformations. For a long time, I composed in that way. In more recent years everything I do is much less calculated, which often happens with people, as they get older. So now these ideas are not necessarily reflective of the way I write music now, but I do not think that there has been that much of a change on the surface of the pieces. That is the point I wanted to make about the so-called “serialism.” I think this should be a strictly historical, musicological term to describe the European attempts that ended around 1960. It really has nothing to do with the music of Elliott Carter, Milton Babbitt or mine. As they say, I will give you a cigar, if you can find one. I must say that most of the music I compose is based on a twelve-note series.

*Which compositions of yours written in your system of transformation of pitch intervallic series into rhythmic series, which ultimately affect the form of the composition, are especially notable?*

Most of my compositions from the 1970s are written in this technique, most notably, the Concerto for Amplified Violin and Orchestra. That is a very good example of this compositional process at work, which

produces in the end something that you probably would not think of as a result of these kinds of compositional techniques.

*You are also known for having created the electronic composition “Time’s Encomium,” which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1970. Could you tell us about this work?*

“Time’s Encomium” was written in 1968 and 1969, which is a long time ago. It is one of only two electronic compositions I have created, and the more large-scale of the two. It is a four-channel electronic work for synthesized and processed synthesized sound, composed by means of the analog synthesizer. All of the musical material used for it was produced on the RCA Mark II synthesizer at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York, which had existed long before contemporary electronic synthesizers came into existence. This was a room-size affair with eight hundred vacuum tubes in it and paper drives that you use for inputting the sounds. I produced the recordings of the sounds on that particular synthesizer, and then I went to the analog studio next door and transformed them to a much broader sound world, gluing the separate sound recordings together. I gave it this title, because in this work everything depends on the absolute, not the seeming, length of events and sections. Many people presently seem to like that composition, but I find the overall quality of the sound to be very primitive, so I am not too fond of it. But that is what was available at that time, so I could not do anything else.

There is one other work involving electronics I have written, which is called “Bamboula Squared” for 4-channel electronic tape and orchestra. I have composed it 1984 with computer-generated sound. I decided to give it a title that would sound scientific. It was connected with these investigations of Mandelbrot I was mentioning, since it was stimulated by his work. The computer generated track of “Bamboula Squared”

implements a recent method of timbral modeling, based on a numerical analogy with the physical system represented by a plucked string. In this work my main use of the computer simulates certain natural processes, which are employed to drive programs that actually create musical structures. After that my interest in electronic music exhausted itself.

*You have composed a number of religious works, including a few Masses and a large work for chorus and orchestra called “Genesis.” Our readers would be very interested in hearing about these compositions of yours.*

I have written two masses. One of them was large, and it was called the “Mass for the Restoration of the Church of St. Luke in the Fields<sup>1</sup>.” This was a church in Downtown Manhattan which burnt to the ground in March 1981 and was rebuilt. I was asked to write a composition in honor of its restoration. It is written for chorus, three trombones, violin and organ. The second was a small work, a “Missa Brevis,” written simply for four-part chorus with organ accompaniment.

My composition “Genesis<sup>2</sup>” for chorus and orchestra sets most of the opening chapter of the Book of Genesis in the Bible in Latin. It was commissioned by a group of orchestras, including those in San Francisco, Minneapolis, and other cities in the USA.

In “Genesis” there is a hierarchization of harmonic language which I employ. This means that if I have a set, and there is a zero, which is sort of like a tonic, albeit without the customary tonal functionality. But it is not purely permutational, as, for example, may be found in Babbitt’s music. Within the overall writing there are certain allusions to diatonicism, which may be characterized as “puns.” As I have mentioned earlier, I did not think there needed to be a complete break with the diatonic past, and that preserving elements of the diatonic past did not mean simply reproducing them and creating the

same music as that which was written in the 19th century.

*This is true, indeed. Similar to you, Schoenberg, Webern and Berg also never thought of themselves as having broken with the tonal musical tradition, but simply as having continued it on a new level. As an example of turning to a particular genre, continued all the way from the 18th century, you have also written a number of symphonies.*

I have composed eight symphonies altogether<sup>3</sup>. All of my symphonies are substantial, large-scale works. Some of them are one-movement works, while others are in several contrasting movements. One of the symphonies is a Percussion Symphony for 24 players.

*You have a few compositions the titles of which employ the term “Bamboula.” These are written for different means, including one for solo piano and one for orchestra. Could you tell us about those works?*

I have a short composition for string orchestra, called the “Grand Bamboula<sup>4</sup>.” The title is evoked by a piano piece by 19th century American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk called the “Grand Bamboula,” which was a concert version of what originally was a Creole dance from New Orleans. It is also a place somewhere, as well as a name of some kind of drum. So it has a number of different meanings. But I just thought about it as a fairly light-hearted title for pieces, where that is an appropriate label for them.

The second work that I wrote, after the string orchestra work, was a piano piece called “Blue Bamboula<sup>5</sup>.” Then in 1984 I wrote “Bamboula Squared” 4-channel tape and orchestra, which I mentioned earlier. Then there was a work written for an orchestra in Miami which was being formed, and they asked me to compose an overture for their first concert in 1986. And so I called it “Bamboula Beach<sup>6</sup>.”

*As far as I know, you have also written a few ballets. I would be interested in finding out about them.*

I have composed three scores referring to the three parts of Dante’s Divine Comedy<sup>7</sup>. The three ballets owe as much to the illustrations made by William Blake toward the end of his life, as they do to the poem itself. In 1974-1975 I composed a work called “A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky,” which enshrines fragments of the last musical sketches made by the great composer late in his life, as well as Stravinsky’s 12-tone charts. This work was choreographed and staged. My ballet “Delight of the Muses” was composed for an event which took place in 1991 commemorating the 200th anniversary of Mozart’s death. Lincoln Center, with the tremendous vision that it always has possessed, decided they would play every single note that Mozart had ever written. Since the New York City Ballet was part of this campus, the Lincoln Center directors tried to get it involved in the project. To their credit, they did not want to dredge every tiny little piece by Mozart and have somebody prance around on stage to it. Instead, among other things they asked me to compose something referring to Mozart. So what I did was make a kind of parody version of several of the piano sonatas<sup>8</sup>. I have always thought Mozart’s piano sonatas as rather minor pieces – they are nice in their own way, but they hardly involve the more profound aspects of his composition. Essentially, they are not heavyweight works, so they were very easy to transform, expand, and then elaborate on their musical material in various other ways. In addition to orchestrating them, what I did mostly was to expand on certain tendencies in the pieces, rather than wrapping them up in a classical way. I also subjected the themes to various complex elaborations. In addition, for good measure I added an excerpt from a scene from “Don Giovanni,” which I transcribed for large orchestra as well.



I took a phrase from John Dryden, “Delight of the Muses,” and used it for the title of this work.

*It is an interesting occurrence, that you incorporated the music of another composer, namely, Mozart, into your own music and elaborated on it, as well as using Stravinsky’s last musical fragments to compose “A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky.” Are there any other examples in your music where you incorporated the music of other composers into your own, besides that?*

I have not incorporated music by other composers into my own works. The only exception is the Percussion Symphony, which has two entr’actes, that are settings for reduced ensemble of two versions of a Dufay chanson. I have done lots of things with early music, including many transcriptions and instrumentations. But I have not incorporated them into my own music.

*It is a very remarkable fact that in 1974-1975 you have completed the last musical fragments of Stravinsky in your composition “A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky.” Could you tell us about that?*

“A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky” for orchestra was not, strictly speaking, a completion of a work by Stravinsky, but the incorporation into my own composition of tiny fragments of his, as well as the 12-tone charts he wrote for projected future works. Many years ago I had a meeting with Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft in the apartment Stravinsky and his wife had on Fifth Avenue at that time. Craft pulled out these sketches and showed them to us, and I was very glad to see them. I suggested giving these fragments some practical use, and Craft was very interested in this idea and got permission from Vera Stravinsky. However, it turned out, that she had to obtain permission herself for these fragments, since she did not have any legal rights over them. But she gave this project her blessing. Finally, the publisher of my music

and Boosey and Hawkes, which published Stravinsky’s music and owned the rights to it, came to an agreement about allowing me to use these fragments for composing a work based on them.

Subsequently, Michael Tilson Thomas commissioned the work, and I wrote “A Reliquary for Igor Stravinsky” for orchestra by using these little musical fragments. I embedded these fragments in an imitation of late Stravinsky, which I took through his little chart of rotations, which I used as the basic musical material. I wrote an imitation of about three or four minutes, and then I wrote my own version of the same thing. So Stravinsky’s material is embedded within a larger structure of mine, and it is very easy to tell the difference between the two of them. I followed a very simple design, to which I added a violin solo in the middle, which actually used all of the remaining material that implicitly figured in Stravinsky’s little chart.

*You have been known for your teaching activities in many institutions, including Rutgers University, where I studied with you during my doctoral studies. Could you tell us about your work as a teacher, and in what other institutions have you taught?*

I started my teaching activities at Columbia University, first instructing harmony and other music theory courses, and then quickly switching to composition, first to undergraduates, and then to graduates. Then in 1971 they denied me tenure, so I quit Columbia University. After that I was hired by the Manhattan School of Music, where I stayed for a number of years. Then I switched between different universities, teaching for one semester each at Yale University, Princeton University, the University of Iowa, the University of Buffalo, the University of California at San Diego, the New England Conservatory, and many others. Eventually I was offered a professorship at Rutgers



University, which was around 1985, and stayed there for about twenty years, until 2005, when I retired from teaching. Except for the first few years at Columbia University, I taught only composition. Occasionally I was asked to instruct a course for graduate students, but that usually never went anywhere.

*You are also famous for having organized concerts of contemporary music in New York. Could you tell us about those?*

In 1962 together with Harvey Solberger I have founded the first new music concert series in New York, which was called the Group for Contemporary Music. It was the first contemporary music concert organization which was housed at a university – namely, Columbia University. At that time, we thought, as everybody else did, that the university as institution would become a wonderful home for the arts. Unfortunately, this never happened. Nonetheless, even though I have not had any connection with Columbia University for many years, to their credit, they have established some kind of School of the Arts, which has managed relatively well.

The point of starting the Group for Contemporary Music at that time, – which was a long time ago and has no bearing on conditions today, – was that performances of new music in New York were done mostly by commercial studio musicians, who were very well intentioned. Some were good players, but did not understand the music they performed – mostly, because there was not enough time for them to delve into it adequately. The Group for Contemporary Music wished to create an environment in which, most notably, the composer himself would be in charge. This did not mean that he would necessarily be conducting or playing himself, – although that would be most desirable, – but at least running the show, so to speak, for the performance of his music, and that this would enable higher standards of

performance. We were successful in elevating the performance standards for contemporary music quite dramatically. Subsequently, other universities around the country began imitating us – first the University of Buffalo, then University of Chicago, then University of California at San Diego, and then other institutions. After our endeavor, organizing contemporary musical groups has become a rather common occurrence.

After I was removed from Columbia University, we relocated to the Manhattan School of Music for a while, and then, when I left there, we found ourselves in a free floating status. Eventually we stopped making concerts on a regular basis, but we would reappear from time to time and make recordings. Finally, a few years ago, after we had been in business for over fifty years, we closed down.

Every kind of composer had their music performed in the Group for Contemporary Music. We did not host a fixed ensemble, but different instruments were involved, depending on the compositions we decided to perform. In terms of a fixed repertoire, we were always especially interested in the three composers I have mentioned before: Babbitt, Wolpe and Carter, but we also performed music by many other composers of that direction who were much younger, some of whom, unfortunately, are forgotten now. We never really included works of some particular trends, particularly the school of John Cage. However, later on I became much more interested in the music of Morton Feldman, and we even became friends with him. But Feldman was a completely different personality, a real composer, unlike some of these other people. We also never performed much of the neo-romantic music, while minimalism had not yet begun.

*Have you had any notable performances of your works recently? Are there any compositions you are working on now, or*

*are there any performances of your works expected in the near future?*

I have had my music frequently performed in New York, throughout the United States and in Europe. In terms of recent performances of my works, I must mention my third opera “Brokeback Mountain,” which was staged by the New York City Opera in June 2018. Before that it was premiered in Madrid, having been commissioned by the Teatro Real, and then

performed in Salzburg and Aachen.

I have now completed another Percussion Symphony. That is expected to be performed in a number of places – first by the institution I mentioned in Miami, and then by other ensembles in other cities. There are many schools that have percussion ensembles which were interested in my first Percussion Symphony, who will gladly take up my second work in the genre.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The work consists of seven sections, the outer two being instrumental, and the central five comprise the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus/Benedictus, Agnus Dei and a Communion motet. The latter is a setting of words of St. John in Latin, which were inscribed at a rood screen in the original church. Its premiere took place on November 20, 1983 at the St. Ignatius Church in Antioch, New York. It was recorded on an Albany Records CD, along with “Genesis” and “A Solis Ortu.”

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Blomstedt, the director of the San Francisco Symphony, where Charles Wuorinen was composer-in-residence in 1985-1989, was the primary initiator of the idea for the work, having suggested to him to compose a musical “Genesis.” It was recorded on a CD of the Albany Records label in a performance by the Minnesota Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Edo de Waart. “Genesis” consists of three main sections separated from each other by interludes, altogether amounting to five movements. The first movement, the “Invocation” is followed the First Interlude, titled “Meditation.” Then, the second movement, titled “Creation History, is followed by the Second Interlude, titled “Cosmology,” after which comes the third movement, “Doxology.” Hereby, the composer presents the phenomenon of God’s creation of the world in different philosophical, conceptual and theological aspects.

<sup>3</sup> Wuorinen’s eight symphonies have been performed by various orchestras in the United

States and in other countries. Some of them have been recorded on CDs. The first one was composed in the 1950s. The Third Symphony, written in 1959 was the first one of them to have been published and recorded. One of them, namely, the Fourth Symphony is a percussion symphony, which, although not, strictly speaking, orchestral, is nonetheless a large-scale work, following the symphonic format. It was written in 1976, performed by the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble with the composer conducting, and released on a Vinyl LP record in 1976. The Fifth Symphony is called the Two-Part Symphony, and it was composed in 1976, followed by the Sixth, the single-movement Microsymphony in 1992, and the Seventh Symphony in 1997.

The composer’s latest work in the genre is the Eighth Symphony, subtitled “Theologoumena,” a work in three movements. It is the most traditional work in the genre, according to its formal design, and the composer has written it that way intentionally. It was composed in 2006 upon the request of James Levine and upon the commission of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in honor of its 125th anniversary. The score of the symphony is dedicated to James Levine. The Eighth Symphony was linked in its conception to another work written shortly before that, the orchestral symphonic poem, “Theologoumenon,” composed in 2003 upon commission of James Levine in honor of the latter’s sixtieth birthday. The title can

be translated as “a private non-dogmatic theological opinion.” Wuorinen was inspired by the “Theologoumenon” of the Neo-Platonist commentator from the 2nd and 3rd century AD Maximus of Tyre to compose the symphonic poem. Then, when he was suggested to write the symphony, he thought of closely connecting it with the previously written symphonic poem, even to the point of playing the latter just before the symphony as a “prologue.” He consciously chose to provide a sharp musical contrast to the “Theologoumenon” symphonic poem, which is why he wrote the Eighth Symphony in conventional symphonic form with three movements, following the classical succession of fast-slow-fast. It was performed in 2006 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with James Levine conducting, and released on a CD of the Bridge Records label, along with the composer’s Fourth Piano Concerto, where Peter Serkin played the solo piano part.

<sup>4</sup> The “Grand Bamboula” was written in 1971 and performed by the Light Fantastic Players conducted by Daniel Schulman, and released on a set of CDs with the composer’s music, titled “Wuorinen: Music of 2 Decades.”

<sup>5</sup> “Blue Bamboula” for piano was composed in 1980 upon a commission by pianist Ursula Oppens.

<sup>6</sup> “Bamboula Beach” incorporates elements of Cuban folk tunes embedded into the context of the composer’s personal style.

<sup>7</sup> These are entirely separate ballets, and it is absolutely not mandatory to perform them together. They are not narrative in their approach, but deal with certain formal structures, derived

from Wuorinen’s interpretations of the events in Dante’s poem. The first ballet of the Dante cycle is called “The Mission of Virgil,” and that describes the events of the “Inferno” part of Dante’s masterpiece. It was composed in 1993 and consists of seven parts. The composer treated the infernal aspect of the poem more formally than psychologically, having translated fragments of it into musical terms. The second is called “The Great Procession,” and it evokes “Purgatory.” It was written in 1995 and contains seven movements, punctuated by a recurrence of a brief refrain. There is a special climactic section at the end of the music, depicting the section of the poem when Dante reaches the Earthly Paradise on top of the Purgatory mountain. There are two versions of this work – one is orchestral, written particularly for the ballet, and the other – for chamber orchestra, meant for a concert performance. The latter was commissioned by the Christian Humann Foundation and was premiered by the New York New Music Ensemble. The third, final ballet is called “The River of Light,” and it describes “Paradise.” The entire trilogy was composed for the New York City Ballet. All three ballets were recorded on a Naxos CD with the Group of Contemporary Music. Wuorinen’s ballet “Five” was composed upon a commission of the New York City Ballet and premiered by them with choreography by Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux on April 28, 1988 at the New York State Theater at the American Music Festival organized by the ballet.

<sup>8</sup> Mozart’s Sonatas for piano No. 3 in B-flat Major, K. 281, and No. 5 in G major, K. 283.

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